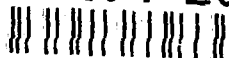


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STUDY PROJECT

CLAUSEWITZ AND TORGAU: LINK-UP ON THE ELBE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HOWARD S. PERRY III
United States Army

SECRET
1992
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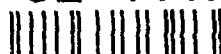
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CLAUSEWITZ AND TORGAU: LINK-UP ON THE ELBE

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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There has been a great deal of speculation and questions raised as to why the United States and the Western Allies allowed the Soviets to capture the Nazi capital of Berlin. This study will address a number of reasons why the U.S. did not challenge the Soviets for Berlin. In prosecuting World War II, the Soviets never forgot Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means. Stalin, who was determined to liberate every East European capital, suspected that the Allies might try a headlong rush to Berlin in April and May 1945. He therefore decided to take diplomatic and military steps to make sure the Allies would not participate in the capture of the German capital. Recent translated material made available through *glasnost*, provides evidence that the top USSR priority in the closing days of WW II in Europe was to block the Allied advance to Berlin and only then systematically take the city of Berlin.

CLAUSEWITZ AND TORGAU: LINK-UP ON THE ELBE

Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that creates war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument , not vice versa. No other possibility exists...than to subordinate the military point of view to the political...

Carl von Clausewitz

There has been a great deal of speculation and questions raised as to why the United States and the Western Allies allowed the Soviets to capture the Third Reich's capital city of Berlin. History clearly indicates that early in the war President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill considered Berlin a great prize and wanted the Anglo-American forces to capture the Nazi capital. However, as the Allied forces advanced farther into the heart of Germany, Berlin appeared to have lost its military and much of its political significance, particularly to Eisenhower and the American leaders. This paper will address several reasons why the United States did not challenge the Soviets for Berlin as well as some of the Soviets' military and political goals in prosecuting World War II.

As early as 1943 the Western Allies were vitally interested in precluding the capture of Berlin by the Soviets. The development of Operation Eclipse or Rankin C Plan is evidence that Berlin was a major Allied objective. This top secret contingency plan was

developed in November 1944 and was to be executed in the event that the collapse of Germany appeared imminent.¹ The plan also delineated the boundaries which would divide a defeated Nazi Germany among the Big Three (U.S., Britain, and the USSR). Operation Eclipse called for an Allied airborne assault on Berlin and directed the airborne units to "gain control over the enemy's capital and foremost administrative and transportation centers...and display our armed strength".² Its primary missions were to enforce the unconditional surrender and disarmament of all German forces. Also inherent within these orders was the capturing of all classified documents, films, and telecommunication systems prior to their destruction.³

The Western Allies were unaware that a copy of Operation Eclipse had been captured from British units during the closing days of the Ardennes offensive in late January and was in the German hands in February 1945.⁴ The Germans were quite upset to learn that the Soviet post war boundaries included much of eastern Germany and that Berlin would be divided between the Allied forces. If this was not bad enough the Soviets also learned of Operation Eclipse, which led to distrust and friction between the Soviets and the Allied forces over the significance of Berlin.⁵

When President Roosevelt first read this plan he was very upset

with the proposed boundaries. Roosevelt wanted the U.S. to have the northwest portion of Germany, not the southern part of the country. He wanted access to the northern ports of Bremen and Hamburg and also those of Norway and Denmark. Roosevelt was also adamant on the extent of the U.S. zone and he stated "We should go as far as Berlin, the U.S. should have Berlin. The Soviets can take the territory to the east."⁶ Roosevelt also wanted the U.S. boundary to extend to Stettin and run northeast to southwest which would have positioned Berlin on the United States' and the Soviets' occupation boundary.⁷

BROAD FRONT VERSUS A NARROW FRONT

One of the most heated and controversial issues of the European War was between Montgomery and Eisenhower and it concerned assaulting Germany on a narrow versus a broad front.

Montgomery briefed his grand single thrust strategy to Eisenhower on 13 August 1944. The plan outlined a massive narrow thrust comprised of four armies aimed at the German Fifteenth Army located at Pas de Calais. Montgomery was very optimistic and briefed that his plan could accomplish several key objectives which were: (1) capture Antwerp and Rotterdam, which would solve the Western Allies logistics problem; (2) destroy the V-1 and V-2 launching sites which were having a devastating effect on English cities; (3) capture the great industrial center of the Ruhr and then drive directly on to

Berlin.⁸ Montgomery was firm in his belief that his plan would solve all the Allies' problems and bring about an early end to the war.

Eisenhower believed Montgomery's plan, though very daring, had a number of flaws, the least of which was that Montgomery would be the commander of the operation. Montgomery had already established a reputation among the American military leaders as a commander who was overly cautious, to a fault in some cases, and was slow in exploiting success. Another drawback was that the great preponderance of soldiers which would be under Montgomery's command were American. Montgomery's propensity to put himself and the British forces in the limelight and ignoring or down playing the efforts and accomplishments of the American forces was well known not only to the American soldiers, but also to the American people. Eisenhower was not about to allow a British general to lead a predominately American force into combat.

There were also tactical and operational weaknesses in Montgomery's plan. The plan called for the utmost speed in achieving the desired objectives, which meant that a large number of German strongholds and pockets of resistance would have to be bypassed. This action would force Montgomery to position a large number of his forces along his route to provide flank security for the main elements. Estimates varied from ten to twenty divisions would be required to provide adequate flank security.⁹ This extensive drain of manpower

and equipment for security reasons would have an adverse impact on Montgomery's final assault on the large German forces in and around Berlin.

The main axis of Montgomery's advance was across terrain which was not ideal for rapid movement. There were numerous water obstacles which had to be forded or bridges installed for crossing and few existing roads available which would restrict movement and make allied convoys vulnerable to ambushes and land mines.

Eisenhower believed that Montgomery's overall plan was extremely risky, but agreed that it had merit in a couple of respects. Eisenhower approved Montgomery's plan to advance and secure the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam. These ports would be critical to sustaining a logistics lifeline to the advancing Allied armies. The destruction of the V-weapon sites was also approved. The destruction of the V-weapon sites had been previously given to the air forces and this effort had siphoned-off a number of air sorties which could be used against Germany's war industries. Eisenhower also agreed to provide some U.S. forces to support Montgomery in securing these objectives. However, he did not approve the single or narrow thrust plan.

Eisenhower's decision to go with a broad front would prove to be the wisest choice because Montgomery was soon to make one of the greatest tactical errors of the war.

Montgomery's advance on Antwerp went relatively smoothly, but in early September 1944 he again failed to exploit success. Montgomery was so focused on reaching the Rhine that he overlooked the significance of the Schelde. The Schelde is an estuary positioned between Antwerp and the open sea and was heavily fortified with coastal artillery batteries.¹⁰ The failure to secure this coastal defense allowed the Germans to reinforce and strengthen these formidable defenses. This tactical blunder by Montgomery would deny the allies use of Antwerp until 28 November 1944.¹¹ This three- month delay created significant shortages of supplies to the Allied forces and slowed their advance to the Rhine because the majority of supplies had to be hauled from the beaches of Normandy. This strain on the supply lines also led to the organization of the Red Ball Express.

Although Eisenhower had not announced his final decision on whether there would be a single or broad front advance once the Rhine had been crossed, he was leaning toward a broad front approach. The single most critical event which convinced Eisenhower to go with a broad front was when Hodges Ninth Armored Division captured the Remagen bridge over the Rhine river, in tact, on 7 March 1945. When General Omar Bradley received word that Hodges had accomplished this feat he was engulfed in euphoria.¹² Bradley was now convinced that Eisenhower would decide on a broad

front, particularly since the Americans had breached the Rhine and were expanding their bridgehead and Montgomery was two weeks away from beginning his move to the Rhine. This stroke of luck also meant that Montgomery would lose his position at center stage in the final assault into Germany, which pleased Bradley greatly.

Eisenhower was now convinced that the broad front was the correct option and plans were finalized to cut Germany in half. The ultimate goal was the total defeat of the German army. This maneuver would also accomplish another problem which was worrying Eisenhower and the other Allied leaders, the reports of a National or Alpine Redoubt. For quite sometime there had been an increasing number of intelligence reports that indicated that as the war drew to an end the German political and military leadership would retreat to the *Alpenfestung* for a last ditch or suicidal stand. British intelligence, the OSS (predecessor to the CIA) and decoded Ultra reports indicated that the redoubt was a genuine possibility and could not be ignored. There was also speculation that a northern redoubt may exist because of the large number of German forces in Norway.

Eisenhower firmly believed that there was a great amount of truth in the redoubt theory and this reaffirmed his belief that a broad thrust through Germany would prevent a large number of troops from reaching the redoubts. Some of the intelligence reports indicated that as many as 200,000 to 300,000 SS and mountain troops would be

defending the redoubt. There were reports that the redoubt was heavily supplied and that there existed underground railroads and a Messerschmitt airplane factory.¹³

Eisenhower could not disregard the type and amount of intelligence that was arriving daily on in increasing quantity. If Eisenhower had any doubt concerning the validity of the redoubt it was dispelled when he received a message from General Marshall which stated "it looks like the German defense system in the west may break up. This would permit you to move a considerable number of divisions rapidly eastward on a broad front...the idea behind this is that rapid action might prevent the formation of any organized resistance. The mountainous country in the south is considered a possibility for one of these."¹⁴

The Allied forces had to prevent the Germans from reaching their southern stronghold. If sufficient German forces were allowed to occupy the redoubt this would probably cause a significant increase in friendly casualties and lengthen the war indefinitely. Even worse Hitler and his Nazi regime might escape and a formal surrender might never be achieved.

At the final wartime meeting of the Big Three in Yalta in February 1945, the last great war time decisions were made regarding the respective zones of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Among these decisions was giving France full partnership in

the occupation of Germany and Berlin. Stalin was adamant that the French should not be a party to the occupation of Germany and this eventually led to the United States and Great Britain giving up a portion of their respective zones to the French. Although the European Advisory Commission (EAC) had informally decided on their respective occupation zones in November of 1944, it was not until 11 February 1945 that the Big Three officially accepted the boundaries for post war Germany.¹⁵ It is also noteworthy that Roosevelt seemingly accepted the fact that the Soviets would reach Berlin ahead of the Allies. However, there was no formal agreement on this subject and some would argue that Roosevelt secretly wanted the Western Allies to reach Berlin first. Roosevelt believed that Stalin could be trusted; Churchill was not as optimistic.

It took less than two months for Stalin to violate the Yalta Agreement. The Yalta agreement had stated that the Allied powers would assist "...peoples liberated from the dominion of Nazi Germany and...former Axis satellite states...to create democratic institutions of their own choice."¹⁶ Stalin clearly adhered to the provisions of the Yalta agreement which were in his best interest and ignored or blatantly violated the pact whenever he chose. It was becoming obvious to Churchill and Roosevelt that Stalin had his own agenda and would stop at nothing to place himself in a position of power to negotiate the post war agreements. Churchill believed the Allies

greatest bargaining chip was to penetrate deeply into Germany and move as far east as possible to meet the Soviets. This is also what Montgomery had in mind and he was still in favor of a single thrust toward the Elbe and Berlin, but the order had to come from Eisenhower. To the east of Berlin Soviet Marshals Zhukov, Rokossovsky, and Konev were receiving intelligence reports which indicated that the task of taking the German Reich capital would be very costly in Soviet blood. Estimates indicated that a million Germans were manning the defenses of Berlin and that three million civilians would be available to assist in the fighting.¹⁷

The Soviet military leaders were also waiting for orders from higher authority to begin the offensive and they too were concerned that the rapid advance of the Anglo-Americans might beat them to Berlin.

Since the boundaries had already been drawn depicting the post war boundaries Eisenhower may have begun to question the value of trying to take Berlin, which was located well within the Soviet sector. At this particular time the Soviets were less than fifty miles from Berlin and the Anglo-American forces were two-hundred miles away. General Omar Bradley had expressed his belief to Eisenhower that the Allies could suffer 100,000 casualties trying to take the Nazi capital.¹⁸ Eisenhower may have decided that there was no reason to waste allied soldiers lives in taking Berlin if we were only going to

return the vast majority of territory back to the Soviets later. Although Churchill would continue to push for the Allies to reach Berlin first, Roosevelt and Eisenhower no longer considered Berlin a key objective.

During the latter days of March 1945 the Western Front stretched from Holland almost to the Swiss border, a 350-mile-wide torrent of men, supplies, and machines were preparing to flood the German plains. The last great offensive was on. Seven powerful armies, eighty-five divisions, a Western Allied force of 4,600,000 men were moving into the heart of the Third Reich for the coup d' grace.¹⁹

On 28 March Eisenhower sent an unprecedented personal message to Josef Stalin (through General Deane (U.S.) and Admiral Archer (British), Military Mission to Moscow) detailing his plans for future operations. Eisenhower's message clearly outlined the Allies plans and ground missions for the next four weeks and he included the army group boundaries. Eisenhower hoped this message would serve several purposes: (1) to determine the Soviets' intent and location to prevent any unfortunate incidents between the Soviets and the Western Allies; (2) Eisenhower intentionally mentioned that the U.S. Ninth Army was being returned to Bradley's control, which would indicate that Montgomery would now provide flank security to Bradley and preclude any move on Berlin. Eisenhower wanted to close the Berlin issue once and for all. (3) Eisenhower also wanted Stalin to

know the great amount of authority that he had over the Allied forces so that the Soviets would refer all queries to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF).

The news of Montgomery's change of mission (flank security to Bradley) had an immediate effect. Churchill telephoned Eisenhower on 29 March and urged that Montgomery be allowed to continue the northern offensive towards Berlin. Churchill felt it was paramount that the Allies capture the capital before the Russians. Churchill was gravely concerned when Eisenhower stated "Berlin is no longer a major military objective."²⁰

Eisenhower sent Marshall a message on 30 March stating that "Berlin is no longer a particularly important objective."²¹ He described his axis of advance which is aimed at Leipzig and included the city "unless the Russian advance meets us west of that point."

Montgomery is to clear out "the whole area of Kiel and Lubeck westward,"²² and link up with the Soviets in the Danube Valley.

Churchill was persistent about Montgomery retaining the U.S. Ninth Army and sent Eisenhower a message on 31 March, which urged Eisenhower to cross the Elbe, if enemy resistance is weak, and advance as far eastward as possible.²³ Churchill firmly believed that leaving Berlin for the Soviets to capture would have important political considerations for post war Europe, particularly since the Soviets seemed certain to enter Vienna and overrun Austria. Churchill states

"If we deliberately leave Berlin to them, even if it should be in our grasp, the double event may strengthen their conviction, already apparent, that they have done everything." Churchill reemphasized these same points, in more detail, to Roosevelt in a message on 1 April. Churchill continued to argue that Berlin was still of military importance. "The fall of Berlin would have a profound psychological effect on German resistance in every part of the Reich. While Berlin holds out, great masses of Germans will feel it their duty to go down fighting...Whilst Berlin remains under the German flag, it cannot in my opinion fail to be the most decisive point in Germany."²⁴ Churchill later wrote; "Actually, though I did not realise it, the Presidents health was now so feeble that it was General Marshall who had to deal with these grave questions."²⁵

Eisenhower was upset by the Prime Minister's message and sent Churchill a reply which clearly detailed his plans for future operations. In Eisenhower's last sentence he said: "Quite naturally, if at any moment 'ECLIPSE' conditions should suddenly come about everywhere along the front we would rush forward and Lubeck and Berlin would be included in our important targets."²⁶ This remark was probably to assuage Churchill, since the likelihood of these events taking place were very remote.

Eisenhower's primary charter, as Supreme Commander, was the total destruction of the German armed forces. However, Eisenhower

was thoroughly familiar with Clausewitzian theory and although he was clearly focused on the military objectives he was willing to consider political issues as well. In a message to General Marshall Eisenhower stated: "But I regard it as military unsound at this stage of the proceedings to make Berlin a major objective, particularly in view of the fact that it is only 35 miles from the Russian lines. I am the first to admit that a war is waged in pursuance of political aims, and if the Combined Chiefs of Staff should decide that the Allied effort to take Berlin outweighs purely military considerations in this theater, I would cheerfully readjust my plans and my thinking so as to carry out such an operation. I urgently believe, however, that the capture of Berlin should be left as something that we should do if feasible and practicable as we proceed on the general plan of (a) dividing the German forces...(b) anchoring our left firmly in the Lubeck area and, (c) attempting to disrupt any German effort to establish a fortress in the southern mountains."²⁷ Although there would be continued discussions about Berlin no one seriously challenged Eisenhower's position about making Berlin a secondary priority.

Eisenhower's decision not to advance on Berlin was not based on any bias toward the British forces. Eisenhower denied Ninth U.S. Army commander Lieutenant General Simpson's request to move on Berlin, then sent Marshall a message which stated; "While it is true we have seized a small bridgehead over the Elbe, it must be

remembered that only our spearheads are up to that river; our center of gravity is well back of there."²⁸

Meanwhile in Moscow, American and British Ambassadors along with Deane and Archer meet with Stalin to discuss Eisenhower's plan. The meeting was brief and Stalin was in full agreement with the plan and thought "Eisenhower's main effort was a good one in that it accomplished the most important objective of dividing Germany in half."²⁹ Stalin did not discuss his plans and informed the delegation that he had to confer with his staff, but would send Eisenhower a reply within twenty-four hours.

Immediately after the Allied delegation left the meeting, Stalin called his two most prominent military leaders, Marshal Zhukov, Commander of the First Belorussian *Front* (army group), and Marshal Konev, Commander of the First Ukrainian *Front*, to Moscow to formulate the plans for the Berlin operation.

Late in the evening of 30 March 1945, Stalin told Zhukov; "The German front in the west has collapsed completely and, apparently, the Hitlerites do not want to take measures to stop the advance of Allied troops. At the same time they are strengthening their groups on all the most important sectors against us."³⁰ Stalin further stated; "I think Roosevelt won't violate the Yalta accords, but as to Churchill, he wouldn't flinch at anything."³¹ As with the British, Stalin visualized Berlin as the ultimate prize of the Great Patriotic War.

On 1 April 1945, Zhukov and Konev met with Stalin in Moscow to discuss the advance on Berlin. Although Eisenhower had been completely up front and honest about the intentions and goals of his war plans, Stalin was skeptical. "Stalin had decided that the Western Allies were lying; he was quite sure Eisenhower planned to race the Red Army for Berlin."³² Immediately upon Zhukov's and Konev's arrival Stalin stated "the little allies (*soyuznichki*) intend to get to Berlin ahead of the Red Army."³³ Stalin did not mention Eisenhower's message of the previous day. Stalin then had his Chief of Operations, S.M. Shtemenko, read the Allied report. Shtemenko, probably at Stalin's direction, deliberately deviated from the true context of the report and specifically implied that the Allies intended to take Berlin on their way to Leipzig and Dresden. All of this, said Shtemenko, "will look like helping the Red Army."³⁴ He further emphasized that Berlin was Eisenhower's main objective and that Allied airborne units were standing by for an assault on Berlin. Shtemenko's final remarks were that intelligence reports clearly indicated that the Allies could realistically beat the Soviet Army to Berlin. The apparent distrust of the Allied forces might have been attributed to the highly secret "Eclipse Plan" which graphically outlined the planned airborne assault on Berlin. How the Soviets gained possession of this sensitive document is unknown.

Stalin then turned to Zhukov and Konev and asked: "So, who will

take Berlin? We or the Allies?" Konev answered: "It is we who will be taking Berlin, and we shall take it before the Allies."³⁵

What was Stalin's purpose for telling this untrue and exaggerated story to his top military leaders? It was to motivate his armed forces into action and Stalin was playing Zhukov and Konev against each other. Zhukov and Konev enjoyed the glory and recognition of being marshals in the Soviet Army and fully understood the importance of capturing Berlin. The *front* which could capture Berlin would surely live forever as heroes in Soviet history and receive the highest accolades from Stalin and the Soviet people. Stalin understood these mens motives and directed that both Zhukov and Konev develop their plans, independently, in Moscow so they could be reviewed by the *Stavka* (General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command) and approved by Stalin before they returned to their respective *fronts*.

On 3 April 1945 Zhukov and Konev briefed their plans to Stalin. Stalin made no special remarks as each plan was briefed, and the plans were approved the same day. However, Stalin upped the ante for Berlin between his two commanders by drawing a line between the First Belorussian and First Ukrainian *fronts*. This line extended to Lubben, located on the Spree River, approximately thirty-five miles south of Berlin. According to Shtemenko, Stalin stated, "whoever gets there first will take Berlin."³⁶ This line is significant because if Stalin had extended the boundary across Germany Konev would have been

excluded in the capture of Berlin. Therefore, Stalin had left the door open for Konev to share in the taking of the Nazi capital.³⁷ Stalin also knew that Zhukov understood the meaning of this subtle ploy and that he would push his front even harder to beat Konev and the Allies to Berlin. The plan was approved and the assault on Berlin was set for 16 April.

Stalin, now having put his plan in motion had one more task to perform, which was replying to Eisenhower's message of 28 March. In his reply Stalin announced his total concurrence with Eisenhower's plan and agreed that the link-up between the Western Allies and the Red Army should be in the Leipzig-Dresden area and indicated that the Soviets' main effort would be in that same direction. The most important part of the message was contained in the third paragraph. Stalin falsely indicates that he no longer has an interest in the Nazi capital. "Berlin" he stated, has lost its former strategic importance." In fact, Stalin said it had become so unimportant that "the Soviet High Command therefore plans to allot secondary forces in the direction of Berlin." The time frame for these events to take place was the second half of May 1945.³⁸

SOVIET GOALS

What were the Soviet political goals? Perhaps in the early stages of World War II the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, had secretly intended

that the Soviets would capture every eastern country's capital and this included Berlin.

The Soviet soldiers themselves had an overwhelming desire to be the conquerors of Berlin, as is shown in a letter from a soldier fighting somewhere in Poland.

As before, I am on my way to Berlin. True, we may not get there in time , but Berlin is precisely the place that we *must* reach. We have suffered enough, and we deserve the right to enter Berlin. Our "military rank" entitles us to it, while the Allies are not entitled to it. They probably wouldn't understand, but Fritz understands it only too well. Hence the frantic resistance with which we are meeting. They keep shelling us *morning, noon and night*, and must have brought pretty well everything they had in the west. They obviously prefer to be licked by the Allies, and not by us. If it happened, it would really *hurt* us. I trust, however, you will soon hear some good news from us. Our fellows' fury and thirst for revenge after all we have seen are more intense than ever. Even in the days of our retreat it was nothing like it...³⁹

"The fact remains that had the Western Powers occupied Berlin before the Russians, it would have created violent anti-American feeling in Russia, especially in the Army. Roosevelt was no doubt aware of it."⁴⁰ The Red Army was also prepared to lose a great number of men in fighting to take Berlin, rather than have the

Germans surrender to the Allied forces with little or no fight.

There is also a significant amount of truth that the Germans did in fact want to surrender to the Western Allies and several offers were made in late February 1945. During this stage of the war Germany realized that they were going to lose most or all of eastern Germany. The German High Command knew this because they had obtained a copy of "Operation Eclipse" and knew the Soviets' proposed zone of occupation, which was most of eastern Germany.

The Germans main concern was to hold the Soviets at the Oder for as long as possible to allow as many Germans to escape to the west. This "secret surrender" began when Waffen SS General Karl Wolff, Kesselring's adjutant, made contact with General Alexander through the OSS in Berne, Switzerland.⁴¹ Field Marshal Kesselring was the Commander-in-Chief, West, who was facing the onslaught of Allied forces along the western front. This original contact was to coordinate the surrender of Italy to the Western Allies and then later the western front of Germany. There was a great deal of skepticism on the part of the Allies, particularly since Wolff had connections with Himmler.

The Allies at this point were not pleased with the actions of the Soviet Union because they were establishing "puppet governments" in every country they overran. While these actions were not technically in violation of the Declaration of Liberated Europe, they

certainly ran counter to the spirit of the Yalta Conference.⁴² (Roosevelt had been the driving force in developing the Declaration on Liberated Europe and based it on the principles of the Atlantic Charter which said "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.")⁴³ There was already a lack of trust between the Western Allies and the Soviets, and the gap appeared to be widening as the pressure of attaining post war advantages increased.

The Western Allies firmly rejected the "secret surrender" and told the Germans that they had to surrender "unconditionally" to all Allied forces which included the Soviet Union. Although the Allies informed the Soviets of these proposed negotiations and denied accepting any covert transactions with the Germans, the Soviets became very suspicious and the trust between the Soviets and the Western Allies was greatly diminished. The Soviets believed that the Germans were making the Allied advance extremely easy and believed that the Germans would allow the Western Allies to advance to Berlin and beyond to preclude their capture by the Red Army.⁴⁴

Eisenhower, in a secret communications to Marshall, Churchill, and Montgomery was adamant in his decision not to make Berlin a military objective. On 8 April he cabled Montgomery: "As regards Berlin, I am quite ready to admit that it has political and psychological significance, but of far greater importance will be the location of the

remaining forces in relation to Berlin. It is on them that I am going to concentrate my attention. Naturally, if I get an opportunity to take Berlin *cheaply* [emphasis added], I will take it."⁴⁵ Eisenhower was confident that this event would not take place.

Montgomery's earlier cable (6 April) had said that after the Allies seized Hamburg and reached the Elbe, they should thrust north-eastward to Lubeck and south-westward to Berlin. This attack would hit the Germans from an unexpected direction "and should be comparatively easy." Montgomery added that he knew Eisenhower did not feel that Berlin had much value as an objective. "I would personally not agree with this; I consider that Berlin has definite value as an objective and I have no doubt that the Russians think the same; but *they may well pretend that this is not the case* [emphasis added]. We know that Stalin was lying and that he was preparing a massive force to assault the Nazi capital.

While the Western Allies had been hitting the beaches at Normandy and fighting their way across the Rhine, the Red Army had not been idle.

On 6 January 1945, Churchill sent Stalin a message requesting information about Soviet intentions of mounting an eastern offensive and when it would begin. Churchill indicated that the Western Allies were running into stiff resistance and that if the Red Army began a new offensive in the east this would alleviate the problem. Churchill

urged Stalin to begin as soon as possible. Stalin replied that he would begin the Vistula-Oder offensive on 20 January. However, the Russian offensive was launched on 12 January, five days earlier than announced. Churchill cabled Stalin thanking him "from the bottom of his heart."⁴⁶

Perhaps, Stalin had an ulterior motive for advancing the Red Army schedule to begin the winter offensive. Stalin was aware of the upcoming Yalta Conference and he wanted to ensure that Poland was in his grasp and that the Soviet forces were well advanced towards Berlin. This would ensure that the Soviet forces were located well into Central Europe and would give the Soviet Union a stronger position to bargain from in post-war politics.⁴⁷

The size of the Soviets force to take part in this offensive was immense. The two principal Soviet commanders who would direct the Vistula-Oder operation towards Warsaw and Berlin were Marshals Zhukov and Konev. The combined forces of Zhukov's First Belorussian *Front* and Konev's First Ukrainian *Front* were impressive: 163 divisions, 32,143 guns and mortars, 6,460 tanks and self-propelled guns, 4,772 planes, and 1,279,800 men.⁴⁸

To enhance success of the operation *maskirovka* (deception) plans were prepared and carried out in great detail. The *Stavka* had directed the three *front* commanders to plan operational and tactical *maskirovka* plans to conceal the time and locations of the attacks and

more importantly to conserve the Soviet forces. Marshal Rokossovsky was the third commander and he commanded the Second Belorussian *Front*, which was located north of Zhukov. This difficult and complex task was accomplished in a superb manner and undoubtedly contributed greatly to the overall success of the Vistula-Oder operation.⁴⁹

The speed and effectiveness of the Soviet advance was spectacular. In less than six weeks the Red Army had fought its way over 300 miles and was now poised on the Oder River, less than fifty miles from Berlin. However, the cost in lives had not been cheap and the forces had outdistanced their supply lines bringing their drive to Berlin to a halt. Perhaps Zhukov, who had studied Clausewitz, realized he had reached his culminating point. He also was very much aware that he was in dire need of fuel, ammunition and other war materials.

The delay in attacking Berlin was of great concern to the Soviet leaders because this extra time was an advantage to the Western Allies and they (the Red Army) still believed that Berlin was their top priority. This postponement did allow the Soviet forces to regroup, receive reinforcements, and critically needed supplies which were vital to continuing the advance on Berlin.

Zhukov's and Konev's *fronts* having rearmed and refitted were now ready to execute the approved plan of 3 April. Zhukov and Konev

would begin their offensive in the early dawn hours of 16 April 1945, Zhukov from a bridgehead along the Oder River in vicinity of Kustrin and Konev to the south along the Neisse River.

The Soviet attack began with a massive artillery barrage which was so intense that it created a fire storm.⁵⁰ As the fires were lifted a force of 1,200,000 Red soldiers began to advance on the German defensive positions. Much to the despair of Zhukov, his forces were stopped by the stubborn resistance of the German defenses. A frustrated and angry Zhukov committed his bomber forces and artillery to destroying Seelow Heights, a German strong point that was responsible for checking his advance. He also committed his First Guards Tank Army earlier than planned to weight his main effort.⁵¹ Zhukov was not about to let Konev beat him to Berlin.

Unlike Zhukov, Konev's forces were enjoying great success, and Konev was undoubtedly pleased with the difficulty that Zhukov was encountering. On 17 April, Stalin highlighted Zhukov's difficulties to Konev and gave him the orders he longed to hear. Stalin told Konev; "Turn your tank armies toward Berlin."⁵² Konev immediately turned his forces to the north and the race to Berlin was on.

April 22 was an important day to both Zhukov's and Konev's Fronts because they began to close the ring around Berlin. However, another significant event was also taking place on the same day.

Zhukov's 47th Combined Arms Army, 2nd Guards Tank Army (Mobile

Group), followed by the Polish Army, and Konev's 4th Guards Tank Army (Mobile Group), 13th Combined -Arms Army, and Zhadov's 5th Guards Army bypassed Berlin and rushed to the Elbe River. A Mobile Group's mission was to find a seam in the enemies, defenses then move rapidly through to the rear areas and create chaos and destruction to logistics sites, command and control facilities, tie down enemy forces, and block the movement of reserves. Mobile Groups were generally armored divisions or larger. In today's terminology a Mobile Group is referred to as an Operational Maneuver Group (OMG). What was the meaning of this unorthodox move?

Recently translated material made available through *glasnost* clearly indicates that the Red Army leaders planned to block the Western Allies' advance to Berlin at the Elbe. In an interview, well after the war, Marshal Zhukov was criticized for launching a frontal attack against Berlin, while other armies used a flanking maneuver. Zhukov's response to his questioner, was; "Dear comrade, you did not follow closely the development of the operation. Look: The 47th Army bypassed Berlin. It was accompanied by the Second Tank Army, followed by the First Polish Army and immediately reached the Elbe. From the south, Konev cut off Berlin with its Fourth Tank Army and sent to the Elbe Zhadov's Fifth Army and other forces. Therefore we reached the Elbe before we took Berlin. I rang up Stalin and he said: "The Americans and the British should not enter Berlin before

us." I answered him that, *precisely our first task was to cut off the Allies from Berlin and then take the city* [emphasis added.]"⁵³

On 23 April, Stalin sent Zhukov and Konev Order No. 11074 which divided Berlin between their respective forces. Zhukov had won the prize. The boundary line bisected Berlin and placed the Reichstag 150 yards within his area of operation. It would be Zhukov's forces to raise the Soviet flag over the Reichstag.⁵⁴ Marshal Konev must have been devastated when he received word of these new orders. For Konev the capturing of Berlin would be a bitter sweet victory.

At 1330 hours on 25 April the Soviets and Americans make their historical link-up at the Elbe. Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue of the U.S. 69th Division would make history by joining hands with soldiers of the Soviet Army at the small town of Strehla. Later the same day Lieutenant William D. Robinson, also of the 69th Division, would meet up with another group of Soviet soldiers at Torgau at 1640 hours.⁵⁵ The Torgau link-up would receive more attention in the future history books. The most important aspect of these encounters was that Hitler's Germany had been cut in half by the Red Army and the Western Allies and the end of the war was very near. And the question of who would take Berlin was settled once and for all.

The Third Reich, which was to have lasted a millennium, was now going through its death throes, but the Germans were continuing to put up a spartan effort against the overwhelming Russian forces. On

the 30th of April Sergeant M.A. Yegorov and Junior Sergeant M.V. Kantaria hoisted the Red Flag on the main cupola of the Reichstag.⁵⁶ Earlier this same day Hitler had committed suicide.

The Soviets had captured Berlin, but the costs were extremely high. Between 16 April and 8 May 1945, the Red Army suffered severe losses: 300,000 men, 2,156 tanks, 1,220 guns and artillery pieces, and 527 airplanes.⁵⁷ These figures dwarf General Bradley's estimate of projected losses to Allied forces, which was 100,000 casualties.

The Germans surrendered unconditionally on 7 May 1945 in Reims, France. As usual Stalin was extremely upset that the Germans surrendered on Western Allies' soil and demanded the Germans sign their unconditional surrender in Berlin on 9 May in Soviet occupied Berlin.

There is no doubt General Eisenhower and the Western Allies were faced with a number of complex and difficult situations which had to be considered in accomplishing their military objectives. These significant challenges undoubtedly contributed to Eisenhower's adoption of the broad front advance through France and Germany. The military considerations which led to a broad front were: (1) the severe logistical problems required to facilitate a single thrust to Berlin; (2) the loss of massive manpower strengths for flank security; (3) blocking the large numbers of troops moving towards the

suspected redoubts; (4) conserving the U.S. forces so they could fight in the Pacific Theater are the most obvious military reasons for conducting the war as he did.

However, there were several political reasons which greatly impacted on the United States not moving to capture Berlin and other East European capitals. The final decisions made at Yalta concerning the division of post-war Germany is baffling. Why did the U.S. and Great Britain not push for the eastern boundary of the occupation zone to include the western half of Berlin? This was obviously an oversight on the Western political leaders and must have had a major impact on Eisenhower's decision not to try for Berlin because it was within the Soviet zone. In his war memoirs Eisenhower states "I always felt that the Western Allies could have probably secured an agreement to occupy more of Germany...I believe that if our political heads had been as convinced as we were at SHAEF of the certainty of early victory in the West they would have insisted, at Yalta, upon the line of the Elbe as the geographical dividing line."⁵⁸

Roosevelt was an astute politician and had a sound understanding of military affairs, but it appears that Churchill was the better student of Clausewitzian theory. Churchill appears to have been more capable of combining the military and political aspects of the war and developing a clearer vision of the final results, while Roosevelt was more concerned with a military victory.

There is no question that Roosevelt and Truman had the utmost confidence in Generals Marshall and Eisenhower and that they concurred with the majority of their recommendations and decisions. However, most of their decisions were based on a military point of view, not from a political angle. General Marshall, a statesman in his own right, wrote Eisenhower when Churchill, in late April 1945, was pushing for the Allies to liberate Prague and as much of Czechoslovakia as possible before the Red Army claimed the territory: "Personally and aside from all logistical, tactical or strategic implications I would be loath to hazard American lives for purely political purposes."⁵⁹ This comment probably caused Clausewitz to roll over in his grave. Clearly war is waged, albeit as a last resort, in attaining political aims or goals.

Perhaps General Emory Upton's thesis that war and politics are distinctly separate and fundamentally different had an impact on the thinking of the United States military and civilian leaders of the 1940's. General Upton, a U.S. Civil War hero, had a profound effect on American military and civilian thinking. Although he died in 1881 his thesis could still be found in official Army doctrine fifty years later. A 1936 Army Staff College text stated that " politics and strategy are radically and fundamentally things apart. Strategy begins where politics end. All that soldiers ask is that once the policy is settled, strategy and command shall be regarded as being in a sphere apart

from politics."⁶⁰

Maybe Churchill was better at the political game because of Great Britain's long experience and knowledge in dealing with geopolitical issues. He knew Stalin and understood that his ambitions were to absorb as much of Europe as he could. Perhaps Roosevelt's biggest mistake in dealing with Stalin was that he believed the Soviet leader would adhere to the principles of fair play and comply with the accords and spirit of the Yalta Agreement.

Aside from the political issues the Soviets clearly intended to take Berlin and may have been prepared to fight the Allies to preclude their taking part in the capture of Berlin. In a message to General Marshall, Eisenhower expressed his concern of Allied forces entering the Soviet occupation zone. Eisenhower stated; "I do not understand how...this can work except with *firm prior* understandings with the Soviet government because if we should be faced by an arbitrary demand from a Soviet commander to vacate any part of Germany allocated to Russia by the three governments, I do not see how I could refuse to do so without the danger of creating *grave misunderstandings if not actual clashes*."⁶¹[emphasis added]

This issue of allowing the Soviets to have a free hand in capturing Berlin will continue to be discussed and argued for many years to come. It is clear that the Soviets never forgot Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means, and that Stalin was

determined to occupy every eastern European capital. Material now becoming available from Russian sources is evidence that the USSR's top priority in the closing days of World War II was to block the Allies first, and only then systematically take the city of Berlin.

Endnotes

1. James Gavin, *On to Berlin*, 269-270.
2. Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle* 123.
3. Ibid., 123.
4. Ibid., 97.
5. Gavin, 270.
6. Ryan, 145.
7. Ibid., 148.
8. Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley*, 268.
9. Ibid., 311-312.
10. Ibid., 319-320.
11. Ibid., 320.
12. Ibid., 406.
13. Ryan, 213.
14. Ibid., 214.
15. Ibid., 162.
16. Ibid., 164.
17. Ibid., 194.
18. Bradley and Blair, 417.
19. Ryan, 127.
20. Ibid., 236.

21. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years: Vol IV*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., 2560-2561. (Hereafter, Eisenhower Papers.)
22. Ibid., 2561
23. Winston Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 463-464.
24. Ibid., 465.
25. Ibid., 465-466.
26. Eisenhower, 2572-2574
27. Ibid., 2592-2593
28. Ibid., 2614-2615
29. Ryan, 243.
30. Zhukov, G. *Zhukov, Marshal of the Soviet Union*, Vol 2, 346-347.
31. Ibid., 347.
32. Ibid, 249.
33. Ibid., 249.
34. Ibid., 249.
35. I. Konev, *The Year of Victory*, 79-80.
36. Otto P. Chaney, *Zhukov*, 308.
37. Ibid., 308
38. Eisenhower, 2583-2584; Ryan, 251-252.
39. Alexander Werth, *Russia at War*, 933.
40. Ibid., 934.

41. David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War, 1943-1945*, 696.
42. Ryan, 163-164.
43. James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom*, 572-573.
44. Zhukov, 347.
45. Eisenhower, 2593-2594.
46. Werth, 952.
47. Christopher Duffy, *Red Storm on the Reich*, 27-28.
48. Chaney, 293.
49. David Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception*, 528.
50. Chaney, 310-311.
51. Ibid., 312.
52. Ibid., 313.
53. *Kommunist*, No. 14 (September, 1988), 101, in *JPRS-UKO-89-002*, January 24, 1989, 72.
54. Ryan, 449.
55. Ibid., 471-472.
56. Zhukov, 385.
57. *Ogonyek*, No. 50, December, 1966, 8.
58. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 503.
59. Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, 43-44.
60. Harry G. Summers, Jr., "What is War?" *Harper's Magazine*, (May 1984), 75-78.

61. Eisenhower, 2612-2613.

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